

Rough notes of a trig

FROM

CALCUTTA TO BENARES.

BY

WOOMA CHURN DOSS.



"It is pleasant sure to see oneself in print.

A book is a book though there is nothing in't."

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PRINTED AT THE 'GUPTA PRESS' NO., 16 MIRZAFER'S LANE.

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Rough Notes of A Trip

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The preliminaries for my trip having been adjusted, a day was to be fixed on for my departure. With this view, I went to consult the priest but the rat played the mischief with his Almanac. There is a set of mortals whom fortune has resolved to make miserable; the dark labyrinths of whose fate lie hid in deep folds of difficulties. No propitious circumstance will favor them but their maximum of exertion at best is attended with minimum of success. It is my own picture that I have drawn. Pinned always by fate between the two horns of dilemma, I persisted the next day to solve the difficulty by the help of a borrowed Almanac. The solution gave rise to a postponement; for a fortnight must elapse before the auspicious day would dawn. It is easier to conceive than describe the impatience with which the fact was received. We all complain of the shortness of human life but I sincerely wished in the present instance that the above intervening space of time were extinguished by some supernatural agency. The imputation of inconsistency is as it were nothing to the sufferings of tedious hours. But the great School of adversity often teaches us the noblest of truths. With the determined resolution of making the best of every thing and seeing only the sunny side of the

picture, I crossed the Hooghly on the appointed day at 10-45, A. M. and took my seat in a third class carriage. Far greater men have assigned their reasons for the choice of the above description of carriages. Some say, ample opportunity, is obtained for inspection of third class life unstarched. Others regard security from danger of collision greater in a third class carriage, the engine being at some distance. But my reason was not either of the two and more forcible than both. The least deviation from it was likely to produce the most awkward practical results. Broken neck or contusion in the spine would have marked the disregard to its validity; for, to tell the truth, who is there adventurous enough to step into the first class carriage with means only to pay the third class fare.

The engine, that velocity formed into a vehicle, moved on and in about an hour the Station at Serampore stared us in the face. People in the greatest bustle were packed into the Train. One gentleman in particular brought with him his luggage, his mug and his quilt and pressed over a young man whose felicitous temper made it an occasion of a good humoured remark. Turning to his fellow traveller, he began to pour out his soul in effusions of gratitude. The other party stark ignorant, slowly demanded the reason. Upon which he said "Dense crowd is as it were, Sir, the common lot here, but thanks are due to you "for not bringing your horse into it."

It is worthy of remark however that no distinction exists between a gentleman with limited means and a boor of substantial circumstances in the third class carriages. Some regard to the feelings of a gentleman ought to be paid in as much as a brain illumined with knowledge should not be put in the same class with the Andamanese. The panacea for this universally complained of evil is the introduction of fourth class carriages.

We touched Burdwan at about 2. 30 p. m. and there put up for two days. Early in the next morning we took a ramble into the country and visited a snug little village at the distance of about eight miles. We had the pleasure of being introduced to a gentleman in a comfortable residence beset as is the custom with parasites. Some praised his generosity, and some his profound knowledge while others more cunning than the rest studied his humour to suit their actions to his word and their words to his actions. The gentleman happened to remark that meat is the most nutritive substance in the world, the flatterer immediately caught the clue and was expatiating on its virtues when the owner gave a new turn to the discourse by stating that meat is good; good no doubt but causes a burning sensation in the chest. "Undoubtedly Sir" returns the other "in a few minutes after its consumption you will perceive as it were "a torch light procession going down the throat" Our sight was next regaled by a tipsy Gurumohosay. The proprietor reprimanding him for his improper conduct, he replied "you gave me my pay yesterday and that has helped me to satisfy my craving for drink. Now it is very hard, one would first supply with the means and then scold again for the end." This reminded me of the prosy orator who reproved Lord North for going to sleep during one of his speeches "Pooh, Pooh, said the drawsy premier, the physician should never quarrel with the effect of his own medicine." The inside of the Patsala presented to our view the figure of a boy who crept into a neighbour's orchard. His plea was for perfect innocence and that what he did was all in a state of dream or under the influence of a certain disease that afflicted him and that consequently the cathartick of the physician was more needed than the birch of the schoolmaster to cure him. At about one we began to return. In the vast field

under a burning sun we felt thirsty in the midway. A neat little cottage appeared to view but its proprietor would not listen to any of our entreaty for assistance. I read in a certain book that "to cure deafness, tell a man you have come to pay him money, it beats acoustic oil all hollow." The present occasion was one suitable for its application and we tried it most successfully. Learning by a collateral inquiry that his son lives at Calcutta my friend accosted him thus "Sir it is a most fitting opportunity to be able to clear the debt due to a son by paying the amount to his father. For the last two years I owe your son a little money but I could not get an opportunity to pay him. I am most happy to have got one at present." The old man was overjoyed to get his lost money as he supposed, made thousand inquiries about his son, above all whether there are further debts or no and withal paid the most prompt attention to our wants.

We started for Jemalpoore. The Iron pony whizzed on at the rate of 12 miles per half hour. We observed all along the same monotonous fields and the sky until near Rajmehal the plain appeared sprinkled all over with cows. The sight contrasted with the utter dearth of milk at Calcutta brought forth the most pleasant associations to the mind. It reminded us of the good old days of Krisna when the cows were most petted and cared and when the wheel of fortune that is incessantly turning round was uppermost with them.

The grey west became gradually enveloped in darkness and the chilling cold of Behar began to seize upon the vital parts of our frame. The open air intensified by frost had not excused us of the blasts. We remained packed up as so many dogs in the kennel. No light was there to cheer us in the gloom save the occasional twinkling of stars in the firmament or the fitful flashes of glowworms crowning the bushes. It is true economy

indeed that dictates to the Railway Company to spare the third class passengers the use of light.

The strongest necessity exists for accommodation near the Railway Station. At one of the intermediate stages we met with a young man shivering with cold who had missed the down passenger Train. We asked him "Have you made inquiry for any good in the Station and what did they say" "They kicked me into the road; that is all they said." At a very little distance from Jemalpoore is the Kherkhira Tunnel a hollow scooped for about half a mile from the hills most tremendous to look at but at the same time attesting to the skill and energy of the European. He who can fetch down lightning from the clouds and make water subservient as a tame horse should preside over the spirits of the mountains.

Convenient accommodation was obtained at Jemalpoore. We found a man frostbeaten being chafed at a fireside created by the serie-keeper. The most kind treatment was given to him in his present difficulties and at a time when a word of gentlemanliness was worth a pound of gold. But the relieved party on revival expressed his thankfulness in a niggardly chowanny. We remember the instance of "the Greenock merchant who being rescued from a watery grave by the help of a sailor put his hand into his pocket and generously presented the deliverer with a shilling. The crowd hissed at him but Burns with a smile of ineffable scorn, entreated them to restrain their clamour, for, said he, the gentleman is the best Judge of the value of his own life."

Accident threw into our way at dead of night a boon companion fresh from Calcutta with a budget full of news. He entertained us with stories of his omnipresence, his quickness of perception, his extraordinary self-sacrifice in relieving the dis-

trest damsels and his open hand of charity in drying the tears of widow's eyes. Many instances he related of his virtues as of a demigod until quite provoked with his egotistical speeches. I told him Sir, "A poet once advertised that he would supply with lines for any occasion. A fisherman sought him for one strong enough to catch porpoise." "Now, Sir, you have assured us of your virtues and power; but can you tell me where can I find my favorite kid which I am in search of for the last seven years."

The Company at this stage was rather dull. It is one of the peculiar features to be remarked in Railway travelling that the carriage started from Howrah will give place within twenty-four hours to three different successions of tenants. First, the intelligent Bengalese, next, the race approximating in many respects the original hill tribes of Bengal and thirdly the robust Beharese. The last formed our present company who in somnolency and gravity can vie with the best bird of wisdom. We felt deeply however the absence of the last night's garrulity and thought best of the advertisement for "a thin man to collect tales for the Railway travellers; salary the first year nothing to be doubled each year afterwards."

God favors those who keep themselves firm in faith. The station at Futwa gave us the company of a young man whose happy temper I will never forget. He had a crimson circlet marked on his forehead and an apparatus for paperkite in his hand. We asked him why he carried that plaything. He said, "it is my fancy. It led me to pitfalls thrice. I narrowly escaped breaking my neck once, but still, fancy is fancy, it will last with my life."

We were quite delighted with the aspect of the fields at Behar. Their green and soft appearance makes them resemble a wide plain overspread with velvet. The granaries of Calcutta

are replenished with its abundant harvests. Its water is nature's sarsaparilla. Thanks to the industrious habits of the people who can dig out such luxuriance from a naturally hard soil.

A comfortable lodging awaited us at Bankipore near the Railway Station. We were regaled there with the story of a woman by a traveller who saw the delivery of a child in the carriage. This reminded me of the woman minister in the fable who was brought to bed no sooner she opened the budget. The anxiety for rising early for the Train oppressed us for a long time and at last sleep closed the wearied eyes. At the depth of slumber we felt a most disagreeable disturbance by a servant who simply came to tell us that we have still three hours longer to sleep. We next travelled for Benares. The stupendous works in connection with the Soane bridge repaid us in pleasure for all the troubles previously endured. Surely, thought I, a nation, whose indomitable energy and whose unlimited resources can give birth to such wonders, ought to rule the destiny of a country so splendid as Hindoostan.

The day advanced and we fell to eating our store of provisions. It was plentiful but we thought of the good old maxim of not deferring that for tomorrow what can be done to-day and so we spared not a crust for the morrow.

At last the temples and ghats of Kasi appeared to view. The position of the city is indeed beautiful. It is one which a painter might dwell upon. The picturesque scene was once drawn up by an artist who wrought his piece to such a high state of perfection that Bissonath Lord of the universe in a dream thanked him for being his creator! The city is bounded on the north by Boroona and on the south by Ousi, the two rivers, whence its name Baranosi is derived. On the east lies the semicircular Ganges like the crescent moon on the night of Purnoimya.

The majestic Ganges has paid by her meandering course a beautiful compliment to Bissonath. She was going rapidly to the sea for the emancipation of the Saugur race but, reminded of her promise, she has taken a delightful turn from the South to the North and passed round Benares for the salvation of sinners. One drop of her holy water is sufficient to wash away the multitudinous sins of a whole life. The works and temples of Auhoolya Bye and Rane Bhobany are amazing. The latter gave away in 360 days an equal number of houses to Brahmins for locating them in Benares. The Dusussomeda Ghat at the jux-ta-position of Auhoolya Bye's is the place where Brahma performed the ceremony of ten horses' sacrifice. The city is apparently built on a hill and is chiefly of stone. It is remarkable however that no Calcutta millionaire has contributed to its adornment.

The resignation of old men there to the will of the Almighty for death is perfectly striking. With them the curse of death is a blessing. It is said, all animals die there with the right ear upturned. There is the story of a European who disbelieved it, and, for experiment, caused his elephant on the point of death to be tied in the opposite direction. The moment for launching into eternity arrived and outburst the chain, upturned the elephant and his right ear pointed directly towards the heavens. It brought conviction home to the European's mind and he turned a votary.

Extremes meet in the centre of the city, the purest holiness with the highest turpitude side by side. You will find quiet contented men, the very picture of purity and emblems of high moral sense. On the contrary, there are men full of hypocrisy and pride, their head only the receptacle of avarice and their hands under the influence of that propensity appear converted into tongs to pinch in shining metals only.

It is said, the very earth of Benares is gold invisible to sinful eyes. Hence not a bit of it is carried away by the pious. But the truth of Bissonath is undoubtedly the most striking moral phenomenon ever witnessed in my life. I picked up an atheist in the street and carried him along with me to visit the shrine. Of course, he had the most preconceived notions against the sanctity of the place. But no sooner did he step into the temple, than awe-struck was he by the red flaring eyes of the priest which were directed towards him in a gush of fury. We abruptly precipitated out and thought of taking a turn round the temple as is usually the custom, but my friend, a perfect stranger in the place like myself accidentally pitched upon the wrong course and, the practical consequence upon us was, for a long time we starved being lost in the labyrinthine streets of the city. In the Pesachmochun mela, I happened to ask my above companion "Well Sir, you now believe in the truth of Bissonath after the trials you underwent." But as he paused a little with hesitation, up came an elephant bouncing on him and he at once confessed his errors and absurdities and turned a most staunch and bigotted Hindoo.

Opposite to Benares is Ramnugger generally called Vyas Kasi founded by Vyas Rishi who sanctified it with the temple of Siva called Vyasesur. The Rishi said, devotion to Bissonath is not calculated to give salvation as faith in Vishnu will do. Bissonath became offended at this bold declaration and drove him out of Benares. The Rishi cannot therefore make Benares his local habitation although he pays occasional visit to it. One day he was discovered by a Brahmin who invited him to dinner. Vyas menu accepted the invitation on condition that one equal to him be found to partake of the entertainment. It was agreed upon by both parties and on the appointed day, Vyas menu made

his appearance. Two seats were prepared; one of course was occupied by the Rishi who curiously inquired for the other to see who this competitor is. The Brahmin to his astonishment produced his Saligram and quietly seated Him on the cushion.

Deb Das was a wonderful character and his exploits deserve to be recorded in letters of gold. His "extraordinary piety entitled him to the peculiar notice of Bissonath who favored him away with his kingdom. Deb Das thus became king of Benares. In a little while after, Bissonath began to pine for his golden Kasi but it was difficult to enter it without Deb Dass's permission. Bissonath languished and endeavoured to retake it but in vain. He extinguished fire from Benares to put the inhabitants to the greatest inconvenience possible. All these however failed. At length Gunnes assumed the appearance of a fortune-teller and succeeded by artifice to induct Bissonath in Benares when the resources of Omnipotence proved almost ineffectual. Hence is the great veneration due to Gunnes Doondaraj.

If there is quarrel, appeal is addressed to Bissonath. The poor and the injured generally exclaim "you have inflicted on me wrong, Bissonath will judge of it." The exclamation sends a terror through the most stone-hearted. Should there be any sick, implicit faith is put in His *churnametro*, and the practical consequence is, he is cured. We blush to mention however that the confident and the self-reliant trace to secondary causes what is due to the Father of all. They attribute to the physical causes of Bhang diluted with water that wonderful efficacy arising from Omnipotence.

His mercy is infinite. The distress and the helpless find the properest shelter under his shrine. Die where they may, hope of eternal salvation is clasped hard in their fist. From the

Boroona to the Ousi and on the east to the Ganges, ten miles in extent from the centre, "the king of terrors is the prince of peace."

We have seen *Yuagies* capable of extracting veneration from the most unfeeling. They are indeed above all wants and aspirations. Devotion is their work day and night and their speech is the chanting of the hymns of Vedas. Their souls have been refined by the counsels of the purest wisdom, their hearts fortified by the study of the most rigorous virtues and their feelings "lapped in Elysium." Should you give them in compassion for the inclement weather a warm cloth, the next moment you will see it bestowed away by the hand of charity.

The erect posture of a Dundie in death convinced us of the strength of virtue which never departs with the life. That remarkable personage feeling the approach of his last hour seated himself perfectly erect in thoughtful meditation of the Most High whose glory shrouds the universe and who befriends the suppliant in the hour of the direst calamity that may befall to man. His was an example that deserves to be copied and the star of his virtues should guide men lost in quicksands of vices and falsehoods. We have read in the life of Addison that while conscious of dying, "he sent for his son-in-law the young Earl of Warwick who had led a gay and irregular life in defiance of all advice. When the Earl approached the bedside, Addison told him that he had sent for him that he might see how a Christian could die." The examples of piety and virtue are not peculiar to any country and might not Hindoostan boast of the above as an ornament to humanity.

Benares excels in its cloth manufacture. Perhaps no country in the world can produce such rich textures, such gorgeous workmanship combined in parts with the neatest elegance, such

fine embroidery, such delicacy in the mixture of hues as the above city. But in several other respects it lags behind like an old man maimed with the load of years. In the cultivation of fields, you will still see the primitive plough. But the most deprecating of all, is the satanic vehicle dignified with the name of *ekka*. To ride on it will not only disarrange the vertebral column but make the brain seethe with a little more fermentation than is compatible with the human system.

The speed of the Railway has enabled as it were the Calcutta seasons to visit the holy shrine. Monsoon which is the scavenger of Benares was present in its Calcutta form. By virtue of its peculiar construction the filth of the whole year accumulates in the sewers of the city. Outside and above, you will see every thing splendid whilst "rank corruption mining all within infects unseen." The effect of the Calcutta monsoon on such a state of things must be tremendous. Houses tumbled without number and thousands lost their lives in the hideous ruin. But there is especial providence in the fall of a sparrow. A bird lay engulfed in a heap of broken fragments, the coolies on removing the rubbish discovered it and heard it repeat distinctly *Kalee Taurao* with wonderful effect.

Our house was turned into a boarding school on account of the dissension between women. Jarring noise and dissonant sounds were the reign of the day. What a motionless and voluble instrument is the Bengalee woman's tongue. Methinks the following advertisement was most appropriate to our occasion. "Wanted an able-bodied Irishman to hold woman's tongue quiet. Constant employment given."

The Secrole is adorned with many noble buildings, amongst them is the college, a very fine edifice. At a great distance from the heart of the city is the Post Office. There is however

a puny letter box fixed near the Dusausomeda Ghat which compelling the letter sender to contract his body seems only as it were to receive his whisper. But praise enough for the regularity of the transmission of intelligence! In a week the rejoinder comes not in the form of a whisper to your ear but letter to your hand. The small letter box can be very well contrasted with the big beggar who is frequently observed mounted on horseback. Fishes are a forbidden food in Benares but we "who have an orthodox heart with a young Bengal stomach" managed to keep ourselves independent of the prejudice.

"For genuine happiness we need not roam.
It is doubtless found with little and at home."

Happy are Bengala's plains, my native land and auspicious must be the day when I will visit you again. Evils there are indeed at home but are they less in a strange land. "Dr. Graham a celebrated quack, while holding forth on a stage of Chelmsford in order to promote the sale of his medicine, told the people, that he came there for their good and not for want. And then addressing his Merry Andrew, Andrew said he, do we come here for want? No faith, Sir, replied Andrew, we have enough of that at home." "The cheapest excursion is into the realms of fancy where no return ticket is required."

I have observed a strange influence of the English language among the Railway Baboos as of the classics among certain Europeans. Address them in the politest Bengallee you can invent and you will obtain but little attention or at best but an imperious command. But use English and you charm them as with a whistle. It brings to my mind the case of "the smart lawyer in Wilmington, North Carolina, who had the misfortune to lose a suit for a client who had every reason to expect success.

The client a plain old farmer was astonished by a long bill of costs and hastening to the lawyer's office, said, I thought you told me we should certainly gain that suit. So I did, answered the lawyer, but you see when I brought it there before the Judges, they said it was *a coram non Judice*. Well if they said it was as bad as that, replied the farmer, I don't wonder we lost it."

On our return in the down passenger Train, we had the company of a young man who blustered out a great amount of his Railway knowledge, his intimate acquaintance with its several officials, his deep interest in its progress and above all his generosity in lending his influence or assistance when any body in the Train fell into difficulty. Now all this was very good to hear and the Train passed by this time the Bidabatty Station. I asked him, Sir, you have told us so much of what you can do, will you tell me of what you can *not* do." "Yes, Sir, replied the gentleman. I can not pay my share of the cost of travelling. I have got the Ticket for Bidabatty Station, but you see the Train did not touch it, now I am pushed on to Howrah and the Lord knows whence is the money to come from to pay my fare."

FINIS.

P R E F A C E

These notes were hastily put down; some of them while actually travelling. They form the attempt of a young man only learning to write. He trusts therefore that the indulgent and generous public will be pleased to overlook the several imperfections which may be therein discovered.